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**Public Health and Public Safety Professionals Urge Citizens to  
*Leave the Fireworks to the Professionals***

“State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, “There are better places to spend this Fourth of July than the emergency room, so be smart and leave the fireworks to the professionals.” He added, “Fireworks are unpredictable and the damage they cause may often last a life time.”

At a joint press conference today, a diverse group of Massachusetts fire, health, law enforcement, and medical professionals all stood together to urge the people of Massachusetts to ‘leave fireworks to the professionals.’ State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan was joined by Dr. Lisa Patterson, medical director of the Trauma Service at Baystate Medical Center, East Longmeadow Fire Chief Robert Wallace and Ware Fire Chief Thomas Coulombe representing the Fire Chiefs’ Association of Massachusetts, FPO Michael Swain, past president of the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts and Campus Fire Prevention Officer at the University of Massachusetts @ Amherst, Magda Rodriguez, coordinator for the Western Mass. SAFE Kids headquartered at Baystate Medical Center Children’s Hospital, State Police Lt. Kevin McMahon, executive officer in the Fire and Explosion Investigation Section, area fire chiefs, code enforcement officials from the Department of Fire Services and members of the State Police Hazardous Devices Unit who will be conducting the demonstration. The single goal of this diverse group of fire, health, law enforcement, and medical professionals is to reduce emergency room visits from fireworks injuries.

**Burn Injuries Take Months to Heal; Leave Scars that Last a Lifetime**

“Despite efforts to educate the public about the dangers of fireworks, we continue to see patients with fireworks-related injuries each year at this time,” said Dr. Lisa Patterson, medical director of Trauma Service, Baystate Medical Center, the region’s Level I Trauma Center. “Fireworks can cause traumatic burns, eye injuries and amputations, which are particularly tragic when they occur to children because they are life-changing events. Treatment is painful and leaves both surgical and emotional scars. However, serious injury can be prevented by simply leaving the fireworks to the professionals at public celebrations,” added Dr. Patterson.

**Fireworks Send Over 3,000 children under 14 to Emergency Rooms Each Year**

“Fireworks are not toys; they are dangerous explosive devices,” said Magda Rodriguez, coordinator of the Western Mass. S.A.F.E. Kids headquartered at Baystate Medical Center Children’s Hospital. “Fireworks can cause serious burns, amputations and blast injuries that can permanently impair vision and hearing. The safest way to enjoy fireworks is to watch a supervised public display where professionals handle them,” she added.

**Fireworks Are Big Business**

“Let’s face it, fireworks is big business in this county and it is hard for our safety message to be heard when millions of dollars are spent on advertising campaigns by national corporations. It’s hard for us to compete with their glitzy direct mail, billboards, Internet sites, and radio ads that entice our citizens into using fireworks,” said State Fire Marshal Coan. “Sadly, all these dollars lead to devastating injuries to mostly children. Children between the ages of 10 and 14 are most at risk of being injured by fireworks,” said Coan. “It is clear that the ad campaigns are designed to target this age group,” he added.

**4<sup>th</sup> of July No Holiday for Firefighters**

Ware Fire Chief Thomas Coulombe, representing the Fire Chiefs’ Association of Massachusetts said, “Traditionally, the Fourth of July has been one of the busiest days of the year for firefighters who, in many communities, provide both emergency medical services as well as fire suppression.” He added, “The illegal use of fireworks by amateurs, bon fires, backyard barbecues gone haywire, lawnmowers refueled while the engine is still hot, and overheating cars mean that the Fourth of July is no holiday for firefighters.”

**Set a Good Example**

Michael J. Swain, Campus Fire Prevention Officer at the University of Massachusetts @ Amherst and past president of the Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts said, “Prevention of fireworks injuries starts when responsible adults set a good example and leave the fireworks to the professionals.” He added, “Unfortunately children and teenagers know where the adults keep the fireworks and when they see adults use them without injury wrongly believe then can too.”

**Fireworks Are Illegal Except for Licensed Professionals**

State Police Lt. Kevin McMahon, executive officer for the Fire and Explosion Investigation Section in the Office of the State Fire Marshal said, “The possession and use of all fireworks by private citizens is illegal in Massachusetts. This includes Class C fireworks, which are sometimes falsely called ‘safe and sane.’ Examples of these are sparklers, party poppers, snappers, firecrackers, and spinners.” He noted that the teens involved in the Columbine High School incident in Littleton, Colorado used black powder from class C fireworks to build all of their explosive devices.

**Illegal to Bring Fireworks into Massachusetts from Out-of-State**

It is illegal to purchase fireworks in another state such as New Hampshire or Connecticut, and to then transport them into Massachusetts. Advertisers cannot be prohibited from advertising fireworks, but it is illegal to purchase fireworks through catalogues or over the Internet for delivery in this state. Many unhappy consumers have lost both their money and

fireworks trying to circumvent the law. State Fire Marshal Coan said, “Play it safe and enjoy the many professional, supervised displays across the state this holiday week!”

### **Fireworks Caused Over \$1.6 Million in Losses in Past Decade**

In the past decade Massachusetts has experienced 577 major fire and explosions from fireworks, causing 17 civilian injuries, nine fire service injuries, two deaths, and \$1.6 million in property loss – all in a state where consumer fireworks are illegal. A majority of these incidents took place during the week of the Fourth of July holiday. Over the same period, the state’s burn registry has had 51 reports of victims with burns extending over 5% of their body surface area. Of these, 60% were people under age 18 and 25% were between 10 and 14 years old.

### **Demonstration of Danger**

Just how lethal fireworks can be, was shown in a startling demonstration conducted by the Department of Fire Services’ Hazardous Devices Unit (a.k.a. the State Police bomb squad). Fireworks, typical of those confiscated by law enforcement authorities, were attached to plywood silhouettes of people. The damage done to the plywood forms was shocking as spectators were asked to imagine how much worse the damage would be to a child’s body. Plywood is much more durable than the human form. Also shown, was how quickly a sparkler can ignite the sleeve of children’s clothing, the damage aerial fireworks such as bottle rockets can do when their flight path encounters a human face and eyes.

Coan said, “This local group of fire, medical, health and law enforcement professionals joins with the national alliance of 21 health and safety organizations to advocate for a ban on consumer fireworks.” He added, “Play it safe this holiday and enjoy the many supervised fireworks displays.”